

**Pastor Tom Mortenson**

**Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York**

**March 5, 2023**

**Communion Sunday - The Rich Young Ruler**

**Mark 10:17-18**

**Prayer:** *Father, again we just thank you and praise you for who you are, for the fact that we can celebrate you for this day, this communion Sunday that we focus on you, your life, your ministry, the cross and what you've done for us there. And so we pray, Lord, as we begin this process that you again would give us the gift of your Holy Spirit, that you are would guide us, direct us, make us able to make this of permanent value, we pray in Jesus' name.*  
*Amen.*

Well again, as I said, this is the day that we remember Christ and his cross. And Jesus on the night before he died he met with his disciples for one final Passover meal. It's described in *Matthew 26* which says: *Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you I will not drink again of*

*this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."*

So again, Jesus took bread and wine and he offered them up as symbols of his flesh and his blood and then he asked his disciples to eat the bread and drink the cup so that they might symbolically be eating his flesh and drinking his blood. And he asked his disciples to repeat this remembrance of his sacrifice on a regular basis, and we call it "the Lord's table." We celebrate it once a month, and we do that by meditating on what it is the Lord Jesus did for us on the cross, by examining ourselves and that means asking God's Holy Spirit to convict us of sin, then by confessing those sins to him and then by participating in the elements. *John 6:53* says: *So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you."*

Well we're following the life of Christ and we're following it in the gospel of Mark. And now we're at the spot where his public ministry, Jesus's public ministry is beginning to wind to a close. And Jesus has just had a confrontation this time with his disciples over the way they treated children. The disciples thought they were being helpful when they tried to exclude children who were being brought forth by their mothers to be blessed, and Jesus took

great issue with that. And we looked at that in depth last month, we looked at childlike faith.

Well our scripture this morning takes us from the innocence of childlike faith to the cynicism of a young man who thought as probably the vast majority of most people think, that is that his goodness should have been good enough for God. The encounter was known as Jesus and the rich young ruler and it takes place right after Jesus was blessing the children. And right off the bat the rich young ruler makes a very telling mistake as he greets Jesus. This is *Mark 10:17 and 18*. It says: *And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him -- this is Jesus of course -- and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone."*

Well here we have in these two simple sentences the classic case of why we all desperately need the gospel and why the vast majority of people don't understand that. I mean some people, particularly the cults, they love to take this verse out of context, stating that it declares that even Jesus, even Jesus didn't refer to himself as good. Jesus took exception to being referred to that way, and he instantly corrected the young man when he called him good. Well, that view completely misunderstands what Jesus was doing. Jesus

was merely correcting the man's premise about goodness itself before he even began to answer the question. Jesus wasn't saying that he wasn't good, he was saying that since he's being perceived merely as a teacher, why would he be referred to as "good teacher" when the only person who should receive that title is the only one who is truly good and that would have to be God? And at this point in the conversation, Jesus, he's got no need, he's got no obligation to tell him who he is. He's simply correcting his wrong premise. And the fact is by this time Jesus has already stated quite plainly and clearly to the Pharisees of whom this person might even be one, that he was in fact all good and that he was in fact the eternal God.

It happened during a heated conversation that Jesus had with the Jews of his day and they were disputing everything about Jesus, including his lineage, insisting that he was born illegitimately. We find that in *John 8:39*. It says: *"Abraham is our father," they answered. "If you were Abraham's children," said Jesus, "then you would do what Abraham did. As it is, you are looking for a way to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. Abraham did not do such things. You are doing the works of your own father." "We are not illegitimate children," they protested. "The only Father we have is God himself." Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I have come here from*

*God. I have not come on my own; God sent me. Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me! Can any of you prove me guilty of sin? If I am telling the truth, why don't you believe me? Whoever belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God."*

Now as you're listening there you hear at the end of his response Jesus makes this incredibly bold statement declaring that he was indeed all good. Now it happens in verse 46. He says: *"Which one of you convicts me of sin?"* You have to understand how outrageous a challenge that actually was. I mean Jesus is not saying which one of you convicts me of a sin, he's saying which one of you convicts me of any sin? I mean he's making claim, and he's stating his case before the Pharisees that he was absolutely sinless, and he's daring the Pharisees to convict him of any sin.

And furthermore as the conversation progresses he goes on to tell the Pharisees that he's the very same eternal God who told Moses in

the burning bush that "I AM" was his proper name. You know, if you all go back to Exodus when God met Moses in the burning bush, they had this conversation; it's in *Exodus 3*. It says: *Then Moses said to God, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' What shall I say to them?" God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel: 'I AM has sent me to you.'*"

Well, *"I AM WHO I Am,"* that's God's way of saying he's the source of all being and *"I AM,"* that's the very same name that Jesus referred to himself as in his conversation with the Pharisees. In addition to that, Jesus tells the Jews that he and Abraham himself have interacted in the past, and of course the Jews are incredulous. Verse 56, it says: *"Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad." So the Jews said to him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?" Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am." So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.*

Well it goes without saying the Jews picked up the stones because what Jesus was saying was flat out blasphemy to them. He was clearly telling them that he was the eternal God and he was saying

it exactly the way God declared it when he spoke to Moses in the burning bush.

So this conversation that Jesus is having with the rich young ruler, it's never about Jesus denying either that he was good or that he was God for that matter. What he's doing really, he's illustrating in no uncertain terms exactly what the idea of "good" means to God. And this young man is thinking like most people think today that, you know, good people go to heaven and bad people go to hell. The mother Teresas of this world, they go straight up when they die and the Hitlers of this world, they go straight down when it's all over. But that's not how it works. God says in *Romans 3:10: As it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God."*

You know that doesn't mean that no one is capable of doing anything of any good in any way anyhow. I mean Jesus himself said: *"Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil."* So we're all capable of doing good works. I mean the fruit of genuine salvation will always be good works. What does "none is righteous" mean then? Well what it means is that man's attempt at goodness is never going to achieve the level of goodness that God's nature demands because

God demands absolute perfection. That's not some lofty goal that God has for us; that's precisely who God is. God is flawless perfection. And God's nature demands absolute perfection to have fellowship with him. This is a demand that's so unalterable that God himself had to become one of us, live out his life perfectly and then die on a cross so that he could give us his perfection instead of ours. I mean the person who goes straight up to heaven is the person who recognizes that it's God's perfection alone which makes him worthy, and he gains that perfection by faith in Christ's sacrifice for him on the cross.

And as we partake of the bread, let us consider this gift that you've been given. You've been given the gift of perfection, and it's given to us through faith in Christ. If you haven't received one of these, just raise your hand and someone will bring them around to you. These are the communion kits. If you'd take out the bread.

Before we partake of the bread, let me read to you *1 Corinthians 11* which says: *But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be*

*judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.*

And each month I repeat this warning, I say that communion is an extremely serious undertaking and to enter into it in an unworthy manner is to literally court disaster. I plead with you, if you're not absolutely confident that you're a child of the King, if you haven't by faith trusted in Christ as your Savior, if you first need to be reconciled with your brother or sister before you bring the sacrifice of yourself to this altar, then just don't participate; just pass the elements along.

I also point out that the other mistake that you can make is thinking that you have to be absolutely flawless in order to participate and that, too, is a mistake the enemy loves. Being a child of the King doesn't mean you don't sin and it doesn't mean you don't fail; it means that you recognize that your salvation is a gift that you have received and it's not something you've earned by being good. And so we quote Dane Ortlund who says: "In the kingdom of God, the one thing that qualifies you is knowing that you don't qualify, and the one thing that disqualifies you is thinking that you do." It also means that when we fail we're aware that we've sinned because God's spirit is now inside us, convicting us of sin. And so we grieve as children who know that we have a

father who longs to forgive and cleanse us, a father who says: *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

So being a child of the King doesn't mean that we're without sin, it means that when we do sin we recognize that we now have an advocate with the Father, we have Jesus Christ himself speaking on our behalf. As *1 John* says: *My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father -- Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.* And that's it, it's because we have the righteousness of Christ, that's what we're talking about this morning, because we have that alien righteousness, it's not ours, it's his, it's given to us, because we have his we are free to eat from his table. And so if you love your Lord, don't deny yourself the privilege that he purchased for you. You know, he lived the life that we were supposed to live and then he died the death we all deserved in our place just so that we could be made worthy of this moment, so that we could be made worthy of heaven so that we by faith in his resurrection could have his perfection instead of our imperfection.

*1 Corinthians 11:23* says: *For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and*

said, *"This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me."* So take, and eat.

This rich young man that Mark speaks of in our text this morning, this man knew nothing of this idea of perfection through faith, and so Jesus is explaining to him in no uncertain terms how impossible it is for him to find that perfection on his own. We go to *Mark 10:17-21*. It says: *And as he was setting out on his journey -- that's Jesus setting out on his journey -- a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments: 'Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.'" And he said to him, "Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth." And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me."*

So Jesus rattles off six of the commandments and it's the six that have to do with man's interaction with his fellow man; and amazingly the young man says, "Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth." It's kind of the same statement that Jesus was making to the Pharisees. The young man insists that he's kept each of

these commandments from the age of accountability onward. He doesn't say "I've tried my very best, Jesus." Instead he insists that he's kept every one of these assiduously since he's been a youth. You know at this point Jesus certainly could have opened up the hundreds of times the young man broke the commandments including the most obvious and glaring one: Do not bear false witness; he clearly was lying. And what the man doesn't get, what the vast majority of your friends, relatives and neighbors who are not believers, what they also don't get is that the standard of good according to God is nothing less than flawless perfection. People just naturally assume that God is willing to mark on a curve based on our abilities. Even those who believe in original sin or the fall, somehow or other they think that God has been forced by the fall to mark us on a sliding scale designed to accommodate our moral inability because after all, nobody's perfect.

Well, what if God insists that perfection is the absolute minimum standard required? Well then what? What do we make of *James 2:10* which says: *Whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it.* Or *Galatians 3:10* which says: *For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse, as it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law."* See, the essence of the gospel is that all of us are born under a curse, and the curse

is the inherited sinfulness that all of us are born with that we got from Adam and Eve. And God's very nature insists that we be of the same flawless perfection that he is, and we're not. And God calls that sin. That's the dilemma that God faced. I mean, a perfectly just God, he can't simply wink at sin and pretend it doesn't exist because he'd no longer be perfectly just. If he maintains perfect justice alone, then there's absolutely no room for mercy and all of us stand universally condemned. But God was perfectly just and perfectly merciful and his wisdom found a way to address both issues. He came down to earth in order to ransom and rescue his sheep, and he did that because we were incapable of rescuing ourselves. I mean, the only way we could ever have fellowship with God's flawless perfection is that we, too, have to share in that same perfection just like Adam and Eve did before they fell. But once they partook of that fruit, their perfection, it was gone, it was shattered forever. And as the progenitors of our race, they literally pass that imperfection on to every one of their offspring, so every one of us is born flawed and broken.

And David pointed out in *Psalm 51*: *Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.* So God says we're conceived in brokenness; we arrive at birth already broken. Again God says: *As it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside;*

*together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one."*

See, we like to imagine that God and man are not that far apart. We see ourselves as a quantum leap from the animals and God is kind of a quantum leap from us. Certainly a big jump but not that big. But the scriptures insist that that's not the case. The scriptures insist that we understand that no one is good, does good or has goodness as God sees it. And there's a reason for that and that's because in God's economy goodness equals perfection and perfection alone. God has only two categories for who you are and what you do. You either embody flawless perfection in both or you are not good. And since humans are incapable of flawless perfection, everything about us is, in God's view, unacceptable. And that's the heart of the dilemma that we find ourselves in. That's the heart of the gospel. We're constantly bringing to God our notion of what goodness is and God is constantly reminding us that anything less than flawless perfection does not qualify as good.

Does this mean that we're not capable of anything worthwhile, that we're so irreparably broken that no good can ever come out of anything of us? Well, you know, that notion just sticks in our craw, I mean, you tell me there's absolutely nothing I can do that's good at all? There's not anything that anyone in the world

ever does, not the Red Cross, not disaster or starvation relief organizations, not the fund raisers for cancer, not even the Boy Scouts, nothing is any good? I'm not saying that at all. I mean all of the things -- those things are not just good, they're very good. It's just that when you begin to compare them to the relative goodness -- or the relative goodness of human effort to the flawless goodness of God's nature, then you begin to see what God is getting at.

Let's say you spent hours and hours, you have a room, you have guests coming, you spent hours and hours cleaning a room in your house and you've swept and you've vacuumed and you've mopped and you've scrubbed and you've done it again and again, and you look back and you're exhausted and you say, "This is as good as I can possibly get this room." And to the naked eye this room is absolutely sparkling.

Now compare that room to an industrial clean room, one that's produced by hundreds of thousands of dollars of equipment including negative pressure air systems that pull a vacuum outside the room that not even one random piece of dust can ever enter that room, and you compare both rooms and now my previously spotless room is absolutely crawling with dirt. I mean what's happened? Well, the standards have changed. What was spotless to the untrained human

eye is no longer spotless to the microscopic inspection of a clean room.

Well now apply that same kind of standard to morals. You know, take an ordinary moral good deed. Choose the classic, how about helping a little old lady cross the street. Now God can look at my Cub Scout days, look at my idea of helping a little old lady cross the street, and he sees the deed but he also sees the heart of the deed. He sees that my little old lady crossing the street deed contained the following: There was a little bit of, oh, good, here's the opportunity for me to earn a merit badge. Well, that's opportunism. Or maybe someone's going to see how good I am because I'm helping a little old lady across the street. Well, that was the sin of the Pharisees. Or gee, aren't I a better person than the three other fellows who aren't helping this little old lady cross the street? That's pride. Or maybe this little old lady will give me some money for helping her. Well, that's greed. I mean, you see what I'm after here? We're talking about any good deed that we do and all you need to do is up the standard. But we're not just upping the standard, we're upping it infinitely and we're bringing it into the throne room of God and we're placing it alongside his flawless perfection, remembering that God has said that there's no such thing as good anywhere. There's none who does good, not even one. I mean, you see why God could say that? I

mean relatively speaking, of course helping little old ladies is good. Absolutely speaking it's not flawless, so it's not good.

The problem is God only deals in absolutes. Can you think of a single thing you and I could ever do that's not somehow mixed with our pride, our sin, our fallenness? We've all heard the scripture from *Isaiah 64*: *All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags.* And you know we're able to toss that scripture off without realizing the extraordinary length that God goes to to communicate the vastness of the difference between his idea of goodness and ours.

And once again at the risk of being highly indelicate I want to repeat what the NIV study Bible records for the term that it translates "filthy rags." The term is "the cloths a woman uses during her period, a time when she's unclean." Now, you have to understand, there's two things about this statement that you have to understand. Number one, this is spoken to a culture in which blood and cleanliness are an absolute premium. You couldn't draw a more horrifying analogy than to compare something, anything to filthy rags in that culture. But that makes the second point about our goodness even more devastating. You see, when you look at the scripture, God is not comparing our bad deeds to filthy rags, what is truly shocking here is he's comparing our best. Listen to what

he says. He says *"all of our righteous deeds are as filthy rags."* You need to let those words sink in. You need to understand what God is saying here. What God is saying is Jesus didn't just die for my sins, he also died for my good deeds, including the goodest deeds I've ever done. I mean even helping a little old lady cross the street, it's filled with my own pride, my own arrogance, my own goodness and it falls far short of God's perfection.

I mean, it's both stunning and humbling to realize that Jesus Christ did everything in his life with the absolute flawless perfection that God's nature demanded. I mean, as a child, as an adolescent, as a teenager, as a man, every thought, every word, every deed of Jesus was flawlessly perfect. His challenge to the Jews, that wasn't hyperbolic or bragging, it was simply fact. *He said to them, "Which one of you convicts me of sin?"* Jesus was the only one who could ever make that claim because he's the only one who ever lived a completely flawless life. And we know that's so because if Jesus had not done so, he wouldn't have been a perfect sacrifice, God's nature couldn't have accepted that sacrifice and Jesus would have remained dead and buried. And as Paul puts it: *If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain.*

So for the 33 years that Jesus spent as a fellow human being on

this planet, never once did he have any thought, any word or any deed that was in any way less than flawless. Just think about that for a moment. I mean consider also that Jesus hung on the cross not just for what I recognize as my sins but also what I consider to be the finest things I've ever done. Even those deeds are mixed with enough sin to make the cross necessary to redeem them. God wants us to never mistake our goodness for his.

And again, does that mean we're depraved and that we're incapable of anything good? We know it doesn't. We know that it means that our goodness is but a relative goodness. We know the rich young ruler had no shortage of that relative goodness and Jesus knew and understood that. That's why Mark tells us: *And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me."*

So now the question is, okay, was Jesus offering him salvation through voluntary impoverishment? Not at all. What he was pointing out is that any human effort to achieve God's idea of goodness is destined to fail. And the curse is such that it will reveal your weakness and imperfection no matter who you are.

You know, I oftentimes hear people say how much I love the sermon

on the mount. Oh, the sermon on the mount is the most wonderful sermon. I think it's one of the most dreadfully awful sermons ever preached, not in terms of content but in terms of what it was claiming and what it was stating. People who say I love the sermon on the mount, they really don't know what they're talking about. I mean, the whole sermon is Jesus applying the law to our existing notions of what our goodness is. And he uses the law to prove that any level of human goodness is just plain not good enough.

You know in *Matthew 5:27* Jesus said -- and this is the sermon on the mount -- he says: *"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.'* Okay, so all the good folk who never actually engaged in adultery are thinking, well, that's me. Here I am pushing this little old lady across the street, that's me, I'm doing pretty good here. Then Jesus says to all those who think because they've never had sex out of marriage that they're somehow good in that area, he says: *But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.*

So what has Jesus done here? He's just raised the standard. And you go through the sermon and he repeats that line of reasoning again and again raising the standard over and over again with a host of other commandments. He says: *"You have heard that it was said to*

*those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.'* But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire." What's he doing? He's relentlessly raising the standard on those who think their goodness is good enough.

Until finally he sums up exactly what law demands and he says this in the sermon on the mount. He says: *"You therefore must be"* -- what? -- *"perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect."* Jesus, you can't be serious. Everybody knows nobody's perfect. But that's precisely the point. The rich young ruler's Achilles heel was his wealth and his possessions, so Jesus pressed him on that and he went away sorrowful for he had many possessions. For someone else it might be anger, for someone else it might be lust, for someone else the inability to speak the truth. The point is Jesus could take any one of us and press us on what we think is our goodness and sooner or later it's going to become self-evident that our goodness is just not good enough. That's precisely why Jesus came to this earth, to rescue us by paying the price of our imperfection on the cross so that we by faith could claim his perfection as our own.

You know when Paul says in *Romans 7:18*: *For I know that nothing good dwells in me*, he wasn't saying he was consummately evil. He was simply saying that nothing he had ever done measured up to the standards of God's good because nothing he had ever done was perfect. And nothing you and I ever will do is going to be perfect as well. And that takes us right back to the rich young ruler, and Jesus is saying the very same thing in *Mark 10* when he said: *"No one is good except God alone."* And what he means is no one is flawlessly perfect except God alone, and that's no small problem for God. Our creator's a being of absolute perfection who demands the same of his creatures. *"You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."* So God happens to be flawless perfection and this happens to be his universe and God offers no apologies for who he is.

Well, the bad news is that every one of us on our own is totally unacceptable to God, from mother Teresa to the apostle Paul. And because none of us is perfect, none of us is good. This may sound at first like really bad news -- and make no mistake about it, it is -- but it's also the starting point of what is the best news you and I will ever hear. *Romans 3:23* says: *For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.* That's the bad news, but the very next verse is the good news. It says: *Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.* And if

you focus in on that one little word in that sentence, that word "freely," you understand that in the original Greek it means a heck of a lot more than it does in English. It means "for no cause" or "for no reason." And what God is saying is for no reason whatsoever on our part God has chosen to justify us. For no reason on our part God has chosen to see us as perfect in Christ Jesus alone. We have an incredibly hard time processing the idea that God's love has been fixed on us for anything other than our good behavior which in God's eyes is nonexistent. That's what "*there is none good, no, not one*" means.

As we take the cup, consider the rich young ruler and thank God that we don't go away sorrowful. We have a great high priest who lived a life of absolute perfection and offered it to us by faith as a means of standing before God now fully accepted, now fully perfected not because of our righteousness but because of his.

*1 Corinthians 11:25 says: In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." So drink.*

This is the part that we call "head, heart, hands and feet." It's some attempt to find some practical reasons to apply what we learn

about Christ and his cross here. And what I'd like us to do right now, just think of all the people that you know who don't identify as born again Christians who just say, no, I don't -- that's not what I want. And how many of them think just like the rich young ruler thought? How many of them thought that it's your personal goodness that gets you into heaven, that Christians are these stuck-up folks who think that their good deeds have made them worthy enough for heaven. How many of these people have actually heard the real gospel, that there is none good, no, not one; that Jesus came to give us by faith the only righteousness that counts and that he gives it to us freely for no action on our part? You see, so often the gospel that people reject, it's not the real gospel. It's their own notion about goodness, something they thought of just like the rich young ruler did.

So how do we communicate the real gospel? Well, only by the grace of God. C.J. Mahaney had a great way of approaching this task. I remember him telling the story. He used to go to the same coffee shop every day. When the waitress asked him how he was, he always responded, "Better than I deserve." Well finally somebody asked him why he said that. He had half the gospel already presented. All he needed to do was explain the good news, that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. So our

practical lesson for today is to realize that most unbelievers have never even heard the real gospel, and for each of us to pray once again for the opportunity to share that good news along with the wisdom to share it effectively. Let's pray.

*Father, I just right now as we are thinking of folks that we know, friends, neighbors, relatives, people who say I want nothing to do with that gospel or people just beg it off and say, no, thank you, chances are they've never heard the real gospel or certainly never understood the real gospel. And so I pray this morning for opportunity, I pray this morning for courage, I pray this morning for wisdom and again this morning for effectiveness as we share with them the real gospel. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*